

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The following invention relates generally to a system which provides an overview of the universe of awards available as a result of gaming endeavors. More specifically, the instant invention is directed to a wide area network which correlates with a gaming instrumentality that allows past, present and future players of the gaming devices an overview of the gaming system, particularly keeping track of a universe of prizes to be earned or awarded as gifts as well as requirements in order to attain same.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Progressive jackpot systems today offer players a chance at winning a single lifestyle-changing jackpot. The effect is that one player wins the money while everyone else just contributes to that prize on gaming machines which deduct from the machine's short term payout to fund the progressive pool. Those large jackpots are paid over time (25-30 years in most cases) and that money, for the most part, never makes it back into the casinos.

Gaming is becoming a larger part of our society. Each day new jurisdictions adopt gaming while other jurisdictions, already having gaming, experience growth primarily in the form of new casinos and renovations of old properties. Players are faced with more and more options as to how to spend their entertainment dollar on a larger variety of gaming devices. Even in existing casinos, the gaming floor provides a player with a large universe of alternatives and opportunities which can over stimulate one's senses particularly because of the extravagant lighting and sounds emanating from and around the machines. Presently, players both new and old to the gaming environment find themselves over stimulated by the wide variety of choices and tend to be attracted to gaming propositions which are familiar because they correlate with either gargantuan pay off prospects or machines having themes which are familiar and resonate themes that can be associated with non-casino endeavors, such as game shows, sporting events, and familiar non-wagering

games. Still, the basis by which a player, whether experienced or not, selects any of the multiplicity of games on a casino floor leaves something to be desired.

While each casino or family of casinos may have a wide area network web site which allows a player to get generalized information with respect to the facilities including accommodation information, upcoming entertainment acts and sporting endeavors for which they can place a reservation, such an overview does not exist with respect to gaming devices per se. Specifically, the universe of gaming devices is much less detailed on a web page insofar as providing particularized information on the overall universe of games, awards potentially available as a function of both gaming selection and proposition adoption within a given game - in short, targeting a goal.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The instant invention organizes the multiplicity of games available for a player's participation. A wide area network is employed to allow a prospective player an overview of the universe of machines that can be played, the different gaming propositions that are associated with one type of machine or many types of machines and the potential award associated with playing one of the several gaming devices and one of the available propositions. It is to be noted that many machines presently allow a player to select one game from several gaming scenarios and one or more betting propositions. The wide area network allows the player to extrapolate from initialization of the machine and through the several games and propositions prior to entering the casino.

The manner in which a player can embark upon research on the wide area network can take a multiplicity of forms. However, there are at least three organizing principles that one may initially utilize in order to make an assessment of subsequent gaming strategy while at the casino. First, the universe of available machines can be scanned and analyzed as to the theme or motif associated with the game. For example, if a player has a penchant for games that are correlative of game shows, board games or seasonal sporting or athletic activities, the universe of potential games can be surveyed as a function of the game theme. Second, the search inquiry can be organized primarily as a function of surveying the universe of potential awards, tournaments, ancillary contests, promotions, special prizes or

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OBJECTS OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, it is a primary object of the present invention to provide a new and novel information system correlating gaming particulars and player eligibility on a wide area network.

A further object of the present invention is to provide a wide area network which affords a player with an information system directed to specific features of gaming devices and its environment.

A further object of the present invention is to provide a device and method as characterized above which is intuitive to the user and addresses potential questions a player may have to allow the player greater focus when actually embarking upon a gaming adventure at a casino property.

A further object of the present invention is to provide a device and method as characterized above which allows a player to plan a trip to a gaming establishment in advance based on added knowledge with respect to the gaming devices, awards, other benefits and perhaps even the player's eligibility for beneficial treatment due to prior status.

A further object of the present invention is to provide a device and method as characterized above which increases the knowledge of a player to enhance the player's enjoyment.

Viewed from a first vantage point, it is an object of the present invention to provide a method for informing prospective and existing patrons of a gaming

establishment, the steps including: posting on a wide area network information on a plurality of gaming devices; posting on the wide area network information on potential awards, promotions and/or contests; displaying procedures correlated to gaming device use to attain specific awards, promotions and contests.

Viewed from a second vantage point, it is an object of the present invention to provide a method for informing prospective and existing patrons of a gaming establishment, the steps including: posting on the wide area network information on potential awards, promotions and contests; and updating the awards, contests, and promotions as they have been changed or previously awarded.

Viewed from a third vantage point, it is an object of the present invention to provide a gaming system, comprising, in combination: means for displaying awards, contests, and promotions on a wide area network; means for acquiring the awards, contests and promotions; means for replacing the acquired contests, awards and promotions with new ones.

These and other objects will be made manifest when considering the following detailed specification when taken in conjunction with the appended drawing figures.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a flow chart of the system according to the present invention incorporated in a gaming machine.

Figure 2 is a flow chart generally describing how a user would manipulate a wide area network.

Figure 3 is a flow chart describing the system by which one discerns what prizes, games and awards are available and the methodology required in order to acquire same.

Figure 4 depicts the system incorporating a gaming machine preceded by viewing the universe potential awards, prizes and gifts.

Figure 5 depicts an exemplary gaming machine.

DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Considering the drawings, wherein like reference numerals denote like parts, reference numeral 10 (figure 1) is directed to the system according to one form of the present invention.

Reference numeral 20 (figure 2) is directed to the methodology by which one uses a wide area network to survey the universe of available prizes, awards and gifts.

Reference numeral 30 (figure 4) depicts a gaming machine system in which the path is not known or recalled initially, but can be discerned immediately prior to playing the machine.

Referring first to figures 2 and 3, it is initially contemplated that a potential player or past player log on to a wide area network correlative of the casino property or the gaming device manufacturer of interest so that the player can view the information. Once at the site of the manufacturer or casino property, the user has the option of introducing himself to the system by a user data field. For example, a user I.D. number or pin number may be requested, along with the user's name and address. If the user decides to avail himself of this feature, the system will respond with an appropriate acknowledgement and perhaps provide a summary of the user's up-to-date status. For example, if the user is a longstanding patron, the screen may reflect the user's current status in the system. In many casinos, frequent patrons are awarded an exalted status that may include a display of accumulated

perquisites from prior gaming activity or and may include a weighted valuation of the player based on prior gaming activity which can weight factors such as prior time of play, increment of each bet e.g., aggregated, averaged or highest single bet made and the player's wagering volume as a function of time. A person of sufficient status may be awarded a gift for the mere fact of having logged on.

Whether or not the user chooses to identify himself, the wide area network preferably will allow the user to view the universe of amenities associated with the enterprise. For example, a listing of the different types of games, both new and old, which are available for utilization at a casino property can be prompted to appear on the screen at that time or alternatively or concomitantly, a universe of all available awards, prizes and gifts can be displayed on the screen for the player's further perusal.

Assume that the player desires to learn the nuances of a new game. On command, the screen will then advance to the particulars of the new game including the nuances associated with play and other informational background which will enhance the understanding and appreciation of the potential user.

Assume instead that the player views the universe of awards, prizes, gifts, promotions, etc., (i.e., incentives above and beyond the pay table) and then selects one of these awards. The player is then instructed as to which games make that specific award available. For example, assume that a casino property periodically makes available as a prize a certain type vehicle in which the user has a present

interest. The screen will then show which games, tournaments or associated instrumentalities need to be played in order to achieve that award, prize or the like. It is to be noted that in certain properties, the availability of a certain prize may only periodically be available. A user having a keen interest in a specific prize can therefore monitor whether or not that specific prize is now available for attainment. The path that a person is required to embark upon in order to achieve the desired award may be accessed as a function of a certain tournament, such as a poker tournament or may be accessed through selecting only certain of the multiplicity of machines on a casino property. Some machines themselves are susceptible to allowing different games to be played and it may occur that only one of several games makes that prize available. By virtue of the present system, a user can obtain the knowledge necessary to plan the next trip to a casino in an attempt to acquire the award or prize. It is also within the scope of the present invention for a prize to be tailored exclusively for a valued patron based on prior profiling. For example, if a player during a recent stay reserved time at a golf course, the prize could be golf related.

Another feature of the wide area network is shown in figure 2 in which the player may be allowed to play one game of his choice or the casino's choice for free, one time or a plurality of times. The outcome of having played the game is displayed on the screen with the determination as to whether the outcome qualifies as a winning outcome or not. If it appears that the outcome is a winning outcome,

an award is due the player which can be advanced to the player by means of a digital voucher which is downloaded onto the user's computer at that time or can be subsequently mailed to the user in due course. It is also possible that the user could redeem the award having been posted by providing identification at the casino property.

Figure 3 reflects a further iteration of that which has just been discussed. As can be seen, the universe of available awards A are to be displayed. Examples of awards available may be a car, a coat, a vacation, etc. Upon a selection of an appropriate award, the path P that is associated with achieving the award is then displayed from a plurality of paths available. For example, the various paths may require wagering for a certain time, a certain minimum bet, a tournament, etc. One or more games G having different variants may be utilizable in order to achieve the desired award. For example, video poker or a 5 reel game utilizing multiple paylines or a certain "brand" machine could be a condition. Alternatively, one or more varying awards can be the necessary outcome from following a single described path.

Setup for the initial game network includes:

- Clear game world data structure.

- Determine number of initial treasures or awards (NT).

- Determine number of initial added bonuses (NB).

- Apportion the bonus prize fund among the NB bonus awards.

For each treasure T:

Choose a game type (poker, reels, keno, etc.).

Choose a game proposition (jackpot ranking).

Choose a base jackpot award for this proposition (e.g. double
jackpot).

Determine whether treasure T has an added bonus.

If so, randomly select one NB bonus and associate it with

T.

Otherwise,

Added bonus is zero

Add T to zero list.

Add T to game world data structure.

Enable live play.

To add a new game to the network:

Communicate with each responding game device.

If game response is validated, add game to list of game world
competitors.

Live play proceeds as follows:

Display list of virtual treasures.

Input player selection of treasure.

Display bonus game proposition to player.

Offer game specified by that treasure for normal play by player.

For each game played,

Evaluate game combination (C).

If C is a normal win, the award and its associated pay is taken from a payable.

If C is the game proposition,

Notify central computer of completed game proposition.

Receive validated award message from central computer.

Award bonus prize to player.

Return player to virtual treasure selection.

Continue live play until:

Player completes game proposition, or

Player chooses a menu function.

A prize won is won as follows:

Look up current prize award for T.

Notify game (G) of current prize award (W).

Set bonus award for T to zero.

Update T in game world data structure.

Add T to zero list.

Add W to unallocated prize list.

Monitoring live play can proceed as follows:

Collect financial data from each competing game.

Compute contribution to prize fund for each game as game treasure factor times dollar value of coins wagered.

Add contribution to prize fund.

Replenish prizes.

Randomly select an unallocated prize W from the prize list.

If prize is a "deficit" prize (top awards),

Randomly select T from zero list.

Add W to T.

Store new T in game world data structure.

Otherwise,

If prize fund is sufficient for prize,

Randomly select T from zero list.

Add W to T.

Store new T in game world data structure.

Figure 4 shows a variation in which the machine at the casino property can be contemporaneously utilized in order to provide guidance to an on site user. As shown in figure 4, once the available awards have been posted on a gaming machine, the user can select which of the multiple awards is of particular interest and the machine will direct the player as to which of the several variations of games allow that award to be attained.

Referring now to figure 5, a plurality of decision making buttons 2 allow the player to navigate through the decision process displayed on a screen 4. In addition, a message box 6 may occupy a marginal portion of the screen to provide further guidance or the message box can be free standing via a display 8 embedded in a housing 12 of the gaming machine 50. The decision making buttons 2 may have multiple functions and can convert into the operative control buttons necessary to make decisions during the course of an actual game leading to an award. The machine 50 shown in figure 5 also includes a currency input 14 and an activation lever 16 which can be duplicative of one of the buttons 2. The screen itself may be touch sensitive which allows a viewer to make decisions by merely pressing onto the screen at appropriate places in order to proceed through a decision making path.

For example, after the machine has been prompted to view the universe of available awards as suggested in figure 4, the path that is required to attain the desired award will be shown along with the decision as to whether or not the player wishes to embark upon that game in order to be eligible to win the desired award. Should the player elect to pursue that award, the game commences. For each increment when the player is playing the game, if the gaming award has not yet been achieved, the player is prompted as to whether or not the player wishes to play again and whether or not the game shall be for the same award. The appropriate decision making can lead the player to either continue to play towards that award or to cash out at the player's option.

Should the player win the award that had been sought, the player is prompted to decide whether or not the player wants to play for a new award in which event the selection path to the desired award is reproduced. If the player has decided to retire, an instruction set appears to prompt the player with respect to transferal of the award to the player. Transferal possibilities include the delivery of the award to one's residence, the presentation of the award contemporaneously or the reservation of the award for subsequent retrieval. Thus, in the case of one having won a vehicle, it may be desirable to have the vehicle delivered to one's residence for any of a variety of reasons. If, for example, the award is an article of clothing, the player can reserve the award for subsequent retrieval and continue play or embark upon other activities.

Figure 1 reflects a variation in which a player likely has availed himself of the wide area network earlier because the goal is firmly in mind. In this case, the person will have located the appropriate machine for achieving the goal and play can commence without the decision making process with respect to which type of play or game or goal is required. Play commences as is customary in gaming devices: the credit meter (6 can double as a credit meter as well as a message box or may be dedicated as one or the other) will monitor ongoing endeavors by the player. As the goal is to be achieved, the player can move on to a new goal or perhaps one in a series of cumulative goals resulting in an enhanced incentive. The player can at any time elect to retire. A "smart" card 60 can be used in conjunction with a card reader

in the machine receiving the card 60 via a slot 15. The card 60 can store an award game in process should the player temporarily cease play and resume play later. Card 60 will update the machine 50 to its status in the game prior to stopping play. Alternatively, a central processor located on site can store the game's progress for the player's benefit for subsequent retrieval. The mechanism by which the incentive is awarded parallels the previously discussed examples.

Thus it should be evident to those skilled in the art, having been informed by the present disclosure, that the foregoing can be regarded as a form of research to discern the existence of certain awards as well as the techniques required to attain the awards. A series of awards could be involved such that attainment of all in the series results in a further award. Thus, the player has the added option of playing or not playing towards such a goal or award. The player has the opportunity to play for both wagerable and non-wagerable awards. Non-wagerable awards may take the form of non-wagerable or wagerable credits. Where non-wagerable credits are involved, various prizes can be had based solely on the number of credits and is not necessarily linked to one specific game or playing strategy.

The wide area network lends itself to showing prizes to be earned through gaming or purchased outright. All prizes can be displayed along with attainment criteria such as game outcomes, tournament outcomes, time played, wagers made (per wager and/or aggregations). By establishing an identity in the system, a player can store credits for a specific purpose.

The system allows new games to be displayed and explained to the player. Demo games can be run on the wide area network resulting in rewards negotiable at the casino, by mail, via a voucher printed by the player's computer printer and transmitted by the network host, etc.

A player can also be allowed to not only receive game content on the internet at home, but can also command the game to be played at the casino. The game may only be known from exposure on the internet and can be called up at the casino with the prior internet knowledge.

Preferably, the instant invention contemplates a collection of slot machines where:

- Each game is connected to a central computer system.
- Each game offers a means for selecting an award from a plurality of choices.
- Each award has a game proposition associated with it.
- Each game proposition has a bonus prize associated with it.
- The games have a means for enabling the player to play for the game proposition.
- The games can evaluate each game score and, in addition to awarding for normal prizes, award the bonus for each successfully completed game proposition.

- Each game communicates with the central computer to update coins wagered for each game type, notify that a game proposition has been achieved, and verify the current bonus for that proposition.

Moreover, having thus described the invention, it should be apparent that numerous structural modifications and adaptations may be resorted to without departing from the scope and fair meaning of the instant invention as set forth hereinabove and as described hereinbelow by the claims.